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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: SECURITY SERVICES QUESTION CDC/USAID
EMPLOYEES

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4(B)(D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In December 2006, the Kazakhstani Ministry of Health (MoH) requested the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Central Asia Region, Almaty (CDC/CAR-Almaty) conduct an epidemiological investigation relating to a pediatric HIV outbreak in Shymkent (southern Kazakhstan). Two blood samples were collected and transported CDC Atlanta. One sample was sent directly from Kazakhstan via Almaty; the second was transported by a CDC/CAR vehicle from Kazakhstan to CDC/CAR-Tashkent office in Uzbekistan. Approximately six months after the epidemiological investigation, the Kazakhstan Committee for National Security (KNB) began an inquiry and subsequent criminal investigation relating to the shipment of samples to Uzbekistan. END SUMMARY.

THE HIV OUTBREAK INVESTIGATION

¶2. (C) In December 2006, the Kazakhstani MoH requested an epidemiological team from CDC/CAR-Almaty investigate an HIV outbreak among children in the Shymkent region of southern Kazakhstan. Six CDC/CAR subject matter experts responded (including the then-CDC/CAR Director Dr. Michael Favorov) to the request from the MoH and initiated an investigation of the outbreak. During the investigation, approximately 94 blood samples were taken.

¶3. (C) Approximately 94 samples were transported by the MoH from Shymkent to the Kazakhstani Republican AIDS Center in Almaty. CDC/CAR-Almaty then received a letter from the Deputy Head Doctor of the Republican AIDS Center to authorize the delivery of the HIV serum samples collected in Shymkent to CDC/CAR Almaty. NOTE: All 94 samples from the MoH did not arrive at CDC/CAR-Almaty at the same time. As a result, 13 serum samples were shipped to CDC-Atlanta for genotyping directly from Almaty. Since the then-Director (Michael Favorov) was not currently in Almaty, the then-Deputy Director (Maureen Sinclair) authorized the shipment to CDC-Atlanta.

¶4. (C) The remaining 81 serum samples later arrived at CDC/CAR-Almaty. In an effort to maintain viability of the samples, the serum samples were subsequently transported via a CDC/CAR-Almaty diplomatic vehicle to CDC/CAR-Tashkent for forwarding to CDC-Atlanta.

KNB INVOLVEMENT

¶5. (C) Since July 2007, three Kazakhstani locally engaged staff (LES) with CDC/CAR-Almaty and USAID Almaty involved in the serum sample shipment have been contacted by the KNB for questioning in a criminal investigation. Questions posed by the KNB included: Who authorized the shipment? Who transported the samples? What was the description of the

vehicle? Who was involved? To the best of our knowledge all of the interrogated LES properly reported the summons and results of the interviews to the Regional Security Office (RSO) in Astana. Apart from these interviews, to date the Embassy is unaware of any KNB punitive acts against any of the LES involved.

¶6. (C) On December 19, 2008, two CDC/CAR-Tashkent LES were interviewed by the Uzbekistan National Security Service (NSS). These staff members (the driver and co-driver of the vehicle that transported the samples from Almaty to Taskhent in 2006) were told that the NSS had been asked by the Kazakhstani KNB to question these LES in relation to a criminal investigation that is currently in process. Questions asked were similar to those that had been posed to CDC/CAR-Almaty staff.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: The Kazakhstani MoH requested CDC/CAR assistance in the Shymkent investigation. The MoH was aware of the arrangements to transport the HIV samples to CDC-Atlanta for confirmatory analysis. In the interest of getting the samples to the labs as quickly as possible, the samples were sent from both Almaty and Tashkent (based on when the respective samples were received by CDC/CAR-Almaty). CDC/CAR-Almaty staff followed all established protocols and procedures. The HIV outbreak is a politically sensitive issue in Kazakhstan and resulted in allegations of corruption and incompetence, criminal charges, and the resignation of at least one Minister of Health. CDC/CAR-Almaty and CDC/CAR-Tashkent have a long-standing positive history with the Ministries of Health in both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The KNB, like many of the KGB successor agencies, tends to be suspicious of foreign activities and conspiratorial-minded.

The Embassy will continue to monitor the situation with regard to the safety and security of our LES as well as ensuring policy is carried out without improper influence.
END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND